PIONEER LIFE
IN THE
NORTH-WEST.

BY JENNIE JONES.

We now began to meet load after load of people, from ten to twenty crowded into a single wagon, leaving the upper country to seek a place of safety. Many of them stopped us, and with the best of feeling for us, as we fully believed, tried to persuade us to turn back, telling us that we would certainly be murdered if we kept on. Somehow we were not infected with the general fright, and laughingly answered that we would go on and see the show out. We arrived at Eau Claire the day after the great fright described. Everything was quiet, and people had returned to their deserted homes."

The panic died out as suddenly and as causelessly as it had begun.

INDIAN CHARACTER.

In the absence of other things to interest and amuse, the study of Indian character, habits, and belief, furnished a broad field for the pioneers. Were not this work devoted to other matters, much might be said, gathered from the close association of the early settlers with these people, that, I am persuaded, has heretofore been unwritten.

They believe in charms for the cure of the sick. They bury articles of ornament and use with the dead. The dead are buried either in a standing or sitting posture, and vengeance is sworn upon any one known to have disturbed an Indian grave, even if long since buried and forgotten. Food is placed beside a grave for many days after burial. If a pappoose dies the Indian mother will carry a block of wood, carved to represent her dead infant, as nearly as their rude art will permit, for many months, bestowing all the care and affection upon the inanimate block that had been given to the living child.

Indians, in their own way, are worshippers of idols. Not long since I heard an Indian relate how, far in the depths of the pine woods, a party came upon a deserted Indian lodge. A good many valuables had been left there, and for their protection a couple of roughly-carved Indian gods had been set up, as no Indian would disturb the slightest article in the presence of one of these gods. The lumbermen told, as a good joke, how their party staid over night at this lodge, and how they used one of the gods for firewood, and how they placed a huge plug of tobacco in the mouth of the other, and thus left it. While listening to the recital, I thought: Is not the Indian's belief as sacred to him as is the Christian's to him? May not his wooden idols be as sacred to him as are the Catholic symbols and sacred emblems to the Catholic? And would it not be the better part were white men to practice the golden rule a little more, even in their treatment of poor "Lo!" And had they always done so, would not much of our most cruel and blood-curdling Indian history been unacted, and, therefore, untold?

INTERMARRIAGES.

In the first settlement of this country, as in many others, there were a good many more men than women. Especially was this the case in the lumber regions. Young men left their homes in the east to rough it in the woods. Their relationship with the Indians threw them into companionship with the Indian maidens, many of whom were pretty and intelligent. They had no white rivals, and, as might have been forseen, the result was that many a good looking and ambitious young lumberman took to himself a dusky wife from the camps of the Indians.—These Indian maidens generally made loving and faithful wives. They soon learned the ways of the whites, and made good housekeepers, and although they might often yearn for the wild Indian life, their love, and their pride in being a white man's wife made them happy and contented.

The husbands, I am sorry to say, did not always prove as true. As time wore away, settlements grew up around them. Wealth poured into the coffers of many, and some grew tired or ashamed of their Indian wives, and separated with them, and married other wives of their own race. Others, and all honor be to them, remained true to their first chosen, and usually had no reason to regret it. One such case comes to my mind, among others that might be mentioned.

The husband had struggled through many ups and downs in business life, and is now a millionaire. His wife, chosen in early life from among the wild Indians, is now an elderly matron. She presides in her splendid home with as much dignity and grace as any of her white sisters. She has made use of her opportunities for improvement, and can read and write well. She is intelligent and interesting in conversation, and is highly respected by all, not on account of her wealth, but for her genuine worth. Every spring, in sugar making time, she goes into the woods and encamps, and enjoys a few weeks of genuine Indian freedom. At other times the yoke of civilization seems to fit her well. Her children are all highly educated, and the daughters, with their dark eyes and raven hair, and rich olive complexion, are very pretty. They are gladly welcomed into the best society.

Another millionaire, whose experience had been similar to that of the other, saw fit to send away his Indian wife, and to marry again. But even to outward appearance his home is not as happy as the other. His proud wife, it is true, makes his home elegant. His dark-skinned children, such as have not grown to manhood and womanhood, are at home, but they look with envy and jealousy upon their half-brothers and sisters, with their fair white faces. The Indian mother, when sent away, went back to her tribe. But her mother love was strong, and twice every year she visits her children. Her former husband gives his orders that she shall be well treated in his home, and the proud second wife has no alternative but to submit. Those who know them best agree in saying that the old wife is preferred to the new. The home is stylish, but there must be heart-burning within.

THE BLACK HAWK WAR.

The Black Hawk war took place in Wisconsin, and was the only Indian warfare of any moment fought in this state. The brave chief, Black Hawk, was captured, after several days' battle, at the Dells of the Wisconsin river, and was taken to Washington. On his return, it is stated, some of his people asked him how numerous were the whites. He took them to the bank of a river, and asked them if they could count the grains of sand on the shore. They told him that they could not. "Neither can I count the pale-faces," said he. He was conquered and afterwards led a peaceful life. All this has found a place in history, and I, therefore, pass it by, with this brief mention.

A WHITE PAPPOOSE.

One more Indian sketch and we will turn to other subjects. The writer was once attending a store, where Indians often came to trade. One day several Indians called to purchase a few articles.—There were two squaws of the party and three pappooses. I always noticed these little wild children, and to-day, having finished trading, turned my attention to them. The two were dark-eyed, mischeivous looking little rogues, but the other! I involuntarily uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for no Indian child was there.

I saw a little girl, about three years old, and from above the little Indian blanket, and coarse Indian garments, looked out a fair white face, which even exposure to the summer's sun had failed to tan.—Light flaxen hair, all uncombed, hung over the shoulders, and eyes of heaven's own blue looked up at me, with an innocent, childish look. The squaw who passed as mother to the child, saw that I had noticed her too closely, and took her and hurried away. I never saw either the squaw or the child again, and all the inquiries I could institute failed to give me any information concerning her.

In imagination I have built many a romance concerning this little waif. Whose child was she? Was she stolen from a mothers's arms, who lived to mourn her, or were her parents murdered by Indians and the child kept alive? When she is old enough, will she not recognize the difference between herself and her companions? And what will be the result?

A whole unwritten romance lies about this child of the forests, for other pens than mine to weave into life.

LAYING OUT A CITY.

Various were the means resorted to by speculators to make a strike, or to "raise the wind," as it was jocularly called in western phraseology. Speculating in lands was a common method, but the gains derived from this were not enormous, and it was somewhat risky withal. Of this particular phrase of speculation more will be said in another place.

It must have been a busy brain that devised the plan of laying out a city where not even a town was likely to ever exist, and the making of a fortune from the sale of lots. So long as this dodge was new it worked well, and some sudden fortunes were gained, but it soon became known and was no longer a paying business. An individual or a company would buy a piece of government land.—It did not matter much where it was situated, as more depended upon "cute" management than anything else. A high sounding city name would be given to the place. Then the land must be laid out into lots, streets run, and a name given to each. A public park, church lots, etc., were not forgotten. The next move was to have nicely printed plats of this embryo city gotten up. A little advertising, setting forth the advantages and future prospects of the place was done, in the way in which it would be likely to do the most good, and glib-tongued agents did the rest.

Sales were made mostly in the east, where men were looking for a chance to get rich in western property. An agent would appear, begin talking up the grand prospects of the new Western city, and when he got people interested, exhibited his plat and sundry paragraphs, purporting to be taken from newspapers, setting forth the beauties and prospects of the new Eldorado, and finally he would offer his lots for sale. Lots would sell all the way from fifty to four and five hundred dollars each, according to the "desirability" of the location, and if an agent happened to "strike it rich," he was not long in making a fortune.

Among these "paper cities" may be mentioned two, as being the most successful frauds known to the writer. These were named, respectively, "Chippewa City," and "Wisconsin City." The former was on the Yellow River, near the Chippewa pineries. It had, and still has, a good saw mill, with the necessary shops and residences for operatives. It still bears the name of "The City" to this day, but has not a much greater population than when it was platted, and lots have dropped wonderfully in price since then. Cattle and hogs have broken down the corner stakes, the streets have grown up to weeds and grass, and there is but little to indicate the existence of a city at that point.

Wisconsin City was situated in the southern part of Wisconsin, in the midst of a prairie. A circumstance that occurred when this city was new, will give the reader a better idea of the extent of the fraud than mere description would do.

A man from the east, who was quite a property owner in the "city," came on to look over his possessions, and with a design of building and improving upon them. The stage brought him to a point within twelve miles of his destination.—He had considerable difficulty in procuring a conveyance to complete his journey, and was a little surprised thereat, but comforted himself with the thought that he would be well provided for when he arrived at the "city." At last he succeeded in engaging a man to take him there in a rickety old wagon, with a broken-down horse, and while he felt a little sensitive about making his first appearance in town in such a turnout, submitted to it as being the best he could do. During the first part of the ride he asked the driver a good many questions with regard to the place and its inhabitants, but found him very reticent, and seeming to know but little about it. So he concluded that he must be an ignorant fellow, and the ride was finished in silence. As they advanced the country grew wilder and more lonely, and settlers less frequent. They had ridden some three or four miles over the wild prairie without seeing a house or an individual, when the driver stopped and got down.

"How much farther have we to go?" asked the traveler.

"This is Wisconsin City," said the driver.

A light broke in upon the mind of the other. By looking closely he could see numerous stakes rising above the tall prairie grass, in regular order, but not even a wild animal betokened the existence of life or activity in the silent city.

The passenger paid his fare back, and returned to the east, a wiser, if a sadder man, and made up his mind that the ways of western men were too deep and dark for the steady habits of the east.

"Wisconsin City" came in time to be a well cultivated piece of farm land.

LAND SHARKS.

In many places settlements were kept back, and the rough, hard lot of the pioneers made harder still by the operations of land speculators, known by the expressive name of "land sharks."

Wherever desirable locations could be found, and where settlers were rapidly coming in, there was to be found the land speculator, who, like the shark, snatched at everything within his reach. These speculators were men having money to invest, and they would buy up all the best locations, and then ask an advance on them above government prices. If this advance was not too exorbitant he was apt to find a ready sale, as those looking for homes were usually willing to pay a good price rather than go farther back from settlements. When the homestead law was passed, giving actual settlers one hundred and sixty acres of land, it was a hard blow on the land sharks. A great impetus was given to emigration, and all parts of the country were settled rapidly. Men would then pass by speculators' land, and go much further back to obtain homes for which they were neither obliged to pay purchase money or taxes for five years. Many pieces of land were left vacant for years, the owners meanwhile paying taxes until it was fairly eaten up, and the owners were glad to either sell at a discount, or to allow their lands to be sold for non-payment of taxes.

Previous to this, however, many would-be speculators came to grief. To such an extent was the business carried, and so rapidly was money made by capitalists, that they grew to be confident of gain, and were not cautious in their movements. The looking out and reporting of desirable locations, by men well acquainted with the country, grew to be quite a paying business. This was called selling numbers. In other words it was the giving of descriptions, such as this: The north-east quarter of the south-east quarter of section thirty-nine, range seven, east, and so on. The capitalist would pay a certain sum for the possession of these numbers, would deposit his money at the land office and experience no further trouble with the matter until called upon by a purchaser.

For a time this business was conducted in such a manner as to be profitable to the capitalist, but after a time even the sellers of numbers became demoralized, and finding that descriptions of worthless land would bring as good a price as any other, were not too particular in their selections. In eastern markets, where men were not well acquainted with the business, but were accustomed to dealing with agents, the seller of descriptions would appear, dispose of his numbers readily and depart, well pleased with his good luck, and not very much conscience-stricken at getting the better of a "shark." Unsalable land, bought in this way, would remain on the purchaser's hands an indefinite length of time until he was glad to get rid of it in any way.

Only a year or two ago I met with a rich Philadelphian, who had come west to look up some land of which he was the owner, and to see if he could not dispose of the same. Said he, "I have owned that land and paid taxes on it for twenty years." He was a little disappointed when he learned that the land was in the backgrounds still, with but little prospect of becoming salable.

He was tired of the matter, and so gave the land as a present to two favorite nieces, whose husbands reluctantly consented to settle on it, provided the giver would build houses for them, be at the expense of breaking, etc. All of which he did, in obedience to a philanthropic impulse.

RELIGIOUS MATTERS.

Even in the first settlement of the country, religious matters were not wholly forgotten. It has before been mentioned how the Catholic missions, preceded, by many years, other immigration. As settlements began to increase, and Protestants, as devout as the Catholics, made themselves homes here, they must, of necessity, have gatherings here and there to keep alive the fires of devotion. These were usually presided over by traveling preachers, rough frontiersmen, who could turn a hand to anything, be it hunting savage beasts, or savage Indians, and who could stand up before a congregation, in shirt sleeves and buckskin trousers, and tell, in words of burning eloquence or of melting pathos, of God's love and goodness to men.

In fashionable churches, beneath silks and velvets, may beat hearts imbued with Christ's love; before costly altars may be preached sermons of wisdom and of holiness; but, it seems to me that here, in these western wilds, in close communion with nature, and through her with nature's God, where men and women gathered from miles around, with no other thought or purpose but pure devotion; where the preacher, rude and uncouth, preached for pure love of the work, and not for any salary, there might be—aye, was, developed a better and purer religion than could elsewhere be found.

From the ranks of the Methodists came the first pioneer preachers. Simple and unassuming in their wants and requirements, they were generally the first to set up their altars and form societies in the wilderness, and though others quickly followed them, to their honor be it said, that these people waited for no conveniences, but where two or three worshippers could be gathered together, be it in barn or shed, in a crowded dwelling or beneath Heaven's blue vault, there was to be found the pioneer preacher, ready to break the bread of life to all.

Let no one doubt that these men were true to their profession, or that they were incapable of inspiring thoughts of holiness, if their words and acts sometimes bordered on the ludicrous. Neither let it be understood that I would desire to ridicule them, but as the pioneers themselves, while venerating and respecting them, could laugh at them sometimes, why should not we?

I knew of one minister, a true christian in the highest sense of the word, who devoted his Sundays to the preaching of the gospel for pure christianity's sake, going from one distant settlement to another, and thus extending his work over a wide extent of territory. Let not this work be underrated when it is told that, during the week he worked industriously at the shoemaker's bench, mending shoes for his widely scattered parishioners, and that when he went his Sunday rounds on a raw-boned pony, he took along his well mended load of boots and shoes, and that, after service was through, he distributed them to their owners just as modern preachers distribute tracts, and gathered in another harvest of *soles* for his following week's work; nor is it to be supposed that *souls* of a more spiritual character suffered in consequence. At the death-bed or at the sick-bed, far and near, was this preacher of the gospel, who mended shoes on week days and saved souls on Sundays, sent for as a counselor and consoler, and no light cause ever prevented his obeying the summons. At weddings and at funerals his faithful, loving service was required, and if in Heaven's book a record is kept of men's good acts, then will the name of many an unpretending and unassuming pioneer preacher hold a foremost place.

Church music was not developed as a fine art in the new settlements, but at most meetings a tune could be at least hummed through, and we have only one recorded instance of where the preacher having failed to "start the tune," and not being aided by the congregation, sat calmly down and *whistled* it through from beginning to end, not heeding the suppressed giggling of the younger portion of the congregation, after which he gave out his text and went on and preached his sermon through, as if nothing had occurred to mar the harmony of the meeting or the dignity of the occasion.

Unlettered as were many of these men, their lack of grammar did not interfere with their earnestness and solemnity of purpose. But what shall be said of the preacher who, in speaking of some scriptural question upon which there had been a local controversy, asserted his own view of the case as an undisputable fact, and to clinch the assertion offered to bet any man five dollars that such was the case. A disaffected member of the congregation stepped forward, and offering to take the bet, the money was put up, and the sermon went on as smoothly as if nothing had happened to interrupt.

Of another minister it is related that, being in the midst of an eloquent sermon, he chanced to look out of the window and saw a shower coming up, and in a neighboring field a man hurrying to get in his hay before it got wet. Said he: "My friends, christian charity and neighborly kindness would bid us adjourn our meeting and help Neighbor Smith get in his hay. Shall we do so at the risk of breaking the Sabbath?" A simultaneous "Yes" came from all parts of the house. Immediately all of the male portion of the congregation, together with the minister, started for the meadow, while the ladies improved the opportunity for a friendly visit. The hay was taken care of, and when the shower came on all the congregation, with the addition of "Neighbor Smith," the owner of the hay, returned to the place of worship, where the thread of discourse was again taken up and continued through without interruption. And who shall say that the concluding prayer was not as acceptable to Heaven as if an act of neighborly love and kindness had not interrupted the sermon?

"The groves were God's first temples." Aye, and the purest and holiest. Out in the free, uncultured realms of nature, where God seemed to speak to man in the whispering breezes, the budding flowers, the springing grass, in all things fresh, and beautiful, and natural, where the pale face, even as poor "Lo," seemed to read

[To be Continued.]